

NEWARK'S CHINATOWN

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Norma Eng Wong, a resident of Newark's Chinatown and owner of the Shunglui Restaurant operating there until the 1960s, with her son, Paul.

The Council has provided funding for a lecture with slides by Yolande Skeete on the Chinese in Newark, a presentation hailed by a standing ovation. Board member Peter Li praised the work: Ms. Skeete, a documentarian at the Sumner Multidisciplinary Arts Center in Newark, "has pieced together a virtual gold mine of information. Her work will fill a void in our understanding of Asian American history as well as Newark history."

As Skeete explained, the Chinese were a thriving ethnic group in Newark from the 1870s to the 1960s. Located in an area behind City Hall, Newark's Chinatown at

the turn of the century had an even larger population than New York City's, reaching a peak of 3000 in 1922.

Sadly, however, a welcome mat was never put out. Originally, the Chinese, most from the same province and many from the same village, were brought about ten miles north of Newark to Belleville to work in a laundry; not only did local residents protest their presence, but a wall had to be built around the laundry to protect workers. Although it was to escape this hostility that many of the immigrants decided to settle in Newark, relocation failed to eradicate their problems. During the

1920s and 1930s, both police and FBI agents raided the community under the pretext of finding illegal immigrants and drugs. The constant harassment ultimately caused many Chinese to flee the city, and by 1933 the population had dwindled from 3000 to 1000.

Perhaps not surprisingly, books on the history of Newark are silent about this vibrant center of ethnic culture, even though it was the widow of a former Newark mayor who built the Mulberry Chinatown Arcade for merchants and families on property she had bought from the family of writer Stephen Crane. At 209 Mulberry stood Newark's oldest and largest grocery store and Chinese pharmaceutical company, which carried some 600 traditional Chinese herbs and served the area through the 1960s.

Newark's Chinatown may, indeed, become history. In the spring of 2002, just two Chinese families whose ancestors date back to the 1870s remain in the old neighborhood. They, along with other residents, are slated to be displaced by the construction of an arena for the New Jersey Nets.

They may seem to have disappeared, but Skeete's work will make it impossible to ignore the contribution of the Chinese to Newark. Her interest is both professional and personal, since the history of the early Chinese diaspora includes her own family history as well. She calls her work thus far "just the beginning." Robert Lee, Executive Director of the Asian America Arts Centre, explains that she "has caught a scholar's fire." He adds: "It is a joy to see her bring this story to life." ♦



Fabricmaker Hulme and his mother, Ellen, in Quang Tri Province, Vietnam.

PHOTO
BY J. A. HULME

RAMIFICATIONS OF THE VIETNAMESE WAR A NEW DOCUMENTARY

John Hulme was three weeks old when his father was killed in Vietnam. "Unknown Soldier," his recent documentary, funded by the Council and being shown at the New Jersey International Film Festival, Rutgers University, on June 28, is his attempt to understand a man he never met. The journey eventually took him and his mother to Vietnam, where they found their mirror images in many children and wives, fellow sufferers compassionate enough to guide their guests to the mountains of Quang Tri Province where a rocket had ended his father's life.

Hulme explains the change that occurred in his project as the work progressed. He had thought the film would merely tell his personal story, but something more emerged. It became, he says, a story "about simple, human things, like duty and honor, redemption and loss, about having to live through unthinkable tragedy and somehow finding the strength to go on, about the courage it takes for people to open a thirty year old wound that will never truly heal." ♦

Frankenstein REVISITED

Congratulations to three New Jersey sites selected among 80 nationwide to host *Frankenstein: Penetrating*

ities that are part and parcel of scientific progress. Developed by the National Library of Medicine and the American Library

ming award to promote the exhibit.

Among the six sections of panels, all presented with written and graphic materi-

In the coming months, Jersey City Library's project coordinator, Assistant Director Sonia Araujo, will work with